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## Final MA Portfolio

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# FINAL MASTER'S PORTFOLIO

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green  
State University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English  
with a specialization in  
Literary and Textual Studies

December 10, 2018

Dr. Piya Pal Lapinski, First Reader  
Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

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### Analytical Narrative

When I applied to the Master of Arts program in English with a specialization in Literary and Textual Studies at Bowling Green State University, I was completing a graduate program at another institution in English with a concentration in English as a Second Language. As a student in my first M.A. program, I enrolled in several literature courses, such as postcolonial literature and theory, African-American literature, and queer theory. The literature courses were a great addition to my studies and writing in sociolinguistics, LGBTQ studies, and aesthetics. As I continued taking literature courses, I naturally, but unexpectedly, developed an additional interest in critical theory, which was influential while writing my thesis on trans language speech communities. Going into my second year, I knew I wanted to continue developing my skills in literary studies and critical theory. I was writing my thesis as well as writing an essay for a postcolonial literature/theory course that enthralled me: it looked at how Yinka Shonibare MBE, an artist, complicates the concept of “authenticity” and cultural identity in the postcolonial context. I desired more of this kind of learning and opportunity to explore similar topics and improve my writing skills. The program at BGSU was especially attractive to me because it offered a specialization that combined two areas of interest: literary studies and textual studies.

The program has fostered my growth both as an intellectual and as a teacher. Due to the faculty and diverse course offerings, I have been able to explore my aforementioned interests meanwhile developing new interests in ethnic studies and critical race studies. Given that it also is a textual studies program, I was also encouraged to explore a long-standing interest: fashion. The faculty nurtured my growth in this field by allowing me to make interesting connections between fashion, literature, and critical theory. From reading a number of texts related to fashion studies/theory and intersecting them with my previous interests, I spent a great part of my time in

the program writing about the ways fashion is used in relation to our bodies and identities.

Because of the work I was able to do in my classes in this program, I have been able to identify fashion as my primary research interest and consequently write on it in a number of different ways.

The essays I include in this Final Master's Portfolio reflect a couple of ways that I was able to write about fashion as well as other interests that I have developed. Moreover, the Portfolio accurately reflects the research interests that I have honed throughout my time in the program. It also, and perhaps even more importantly, reflects my growth as a writer in the fields of literary and textual studies, in general. The essays demonstrate my journey—as a scholar and writer.

As a scholar, all the essays deal with “identity,” more specifically ethnic/racial minorities, disability, and/or queer identities. Given that I began my graduate career studying sociolinguistics, it makes sense that “identity” would be the one common theme throughout all the essays. The first essay begins focusing on identity as it relates to the body and disability, then I move to the second essay continuing to discuss the way identity is shaped by the body and disability. In this essay I also center a discussion about fashion as a tool for identity formation, specifically as it relates to (dis)abled bodies. I center the discussion of fashion in the third essay as it relates to queer identities. Then, the last essay deals with negotiations of queer identity and female beauty. By organizing the essays in this manner, I attempt for the Portfolio to construct its own narrative about “identity” in different contexts.

As a writer, I purposefully include one essay from both my first and third semesters and two essays from my last semester in the program. I desire for the Portfolio to not only be a reflection of my research interests but also of my growth as a writer. The program helped me to

find my voice as a novice scholar-writer. As a result, I was able to develop my own unique sense of style in writing, and I continue to work on molding it to look, read, and sound how I desire it for my audience. I recognize that doing so will be a lifelong endeavor.

The first selection—“Damaged Bodies in a Poisoned Land: Cerezita's Reclaiming of Collective Identity in Cherrie Moraga's *Heroes and Saints*”—focuses on the way the central protagonist, Cerezita Valle, unites her local Latino immigrant farm worker community in order to reclaim their collective identity by way of the violence inflicted on them from incessant poisoning. This work originally was a conference paper that I later turned into a critical essay. It is also a reflection of my writing at the beginning of the program: I wrote this essay at the end of my first semester. Returning to it again for the Portfolio, I spent considerable time reorganizing it. It was disjointed in places, which affected the coherency and quality of my argument.

In “Fashioning Disability, Creating (In)Visibility in Alexander McQueen's ‘No. 13,’” the second selection, I argue that Alexander McQueen fashions Aimee Mullins's disability (in)visible in his show “No. 13”. While it was McQueen's intention not to bring attention to her disability and thus make it invisible, through a number of decisions about how to stylize her and where to include her in the show, he also renders her disabled body visible. I then seek to problematize how fashion designers going forward should ethically incorporate all bodies into their shows without (sub)consciously elevating body perfection. Similar to the first essay, I needed to reorganize significant parts of this work. There were also places where I did not fully develop my ideas. In these latter cases I worked on developing some of those ideas, and I also eliminated some of them. When I reread this essay, I found some ideas did not belong in this particular essay; they would have a more meaningful contribution to another essay with a

different argument. In other words, I originally forced some of these ideas into this essay because I took great interest in them, not because they supported this thesis.

The next and third selection entitled “Fashioned Bodies in Trans/National Translation: Negotiating Queer Puerto Rican Identities in Mayra Santos-Febres’s *Sirena Selena*” aims to highlight the ways Selena and Martha, two queer Puerto Ricans, use fashion in order to negotiate the translation of their bodies in various contexts, including when crossing transnational borders. I recall how much I enjoyed writing this essay because I had been interested for some time in the question of how bodies translate across borders. I was invested in a great deal of theory related to translation, but in this work, I particularly liked how I managed to rethink translation as it is concerned with fashion, queer bodies and trans/national borders. In the revision process for the Portfolio I again reorganized many sections of the essay. Since I discuss both Selena and Martha’s narratives, I also created and labeled sections in the essay in order to assist with clarity. The original essay was difficult to follow in certain places and the two characters’ narratives overlapped at times when I did not want them to. Spending time on the reorganization of my ideas should also make reading it more pleasurable and, more importantly, my argument stronger.

The last selection is entitled “Commodification of Female Beauty and the Queer Body in Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dog eaters*”. I argue in this essay that the two central protagonists named Rio and Joey experience bodily commodification in the neocolonial context as a result of their female beauty and queer identity, respectively. I labeled this essay as my substantive research and analysis in the Portfolio because it demonstrates my abilities to do both substantive research and substantive analysis well. Focusing on Hagedorn’s *Dog eaters* is no simple task; it is a postmodern text that requires several readings in order to make necessary and interesting

connections between the disparate narratives written in various genres and styles. I knew I wanted to continue writing about “the body” and “identity” when I first wrote this essay, but I had to reread it numerous times in order to be able to make the connection between Rio and Joey’s narratives. Eventually, I was able to do so around the idea of what commodification of bodies and identities looks like in the neocolonial context, in this case it is set in the Philippines. As I did with the third selection, I created sections for this essay in order to keep the two characters’ narratives easily distinguishable. In addition, I reorganized a number of different places in this work. My most difficult task in this essay was to demonstrate how neocolonialism creates a violent space for commodification of bodies and identities to occur. Revisiting this essay again allowed me to make that argument clearer.

The Final Master’s Portfolio reveals the best work I have done as a graduate student in the M.A. in English program. But it also reveals who I am as a person and young scholar. I also find it reveals my journey in the program and my research trajectory beyond the program. As I continue to teach composition, literature, and cultural studies courses, I am inspired to share the work I have read and written with my students. Because of this program, in general, and the faculty who I had the great honor to learn from, I am a better person, student, and teacher.



### Damaged Bodies in a Poisoned Land:

#### Cerezita's Reclaiming of Collective Identity in Cherrie Moraga's *Heroes and Saints*

In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler challenges us to consider what constitutes as a viable definition for “those boundaries of bodily life where abjected or delegitimated bodies fail to count as ‘bodies’” (xxiv). In other words, how should one conceive what qualifies as a viable body? “What challenge,” Butler inquires, “does that excluded and abjected realm produce to a symbolic hegemony that might force a radical rearticulation of what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as ‘life,’ lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, life worth grieving” (xxiv)? Cherrie Moraga’s play titled *Heroes and Saints* addresses these rather arduous queries.

*Heroes and Saints* is set in 1988. Inhabited by Latino immigrant farm workers, the play’s setting is in the fictional town named McLaughlin—located in the San Joaquin Valley, California. While Moraga notes that the play indeed is fiction, her inspiration for writing the piece undoubtedly came from the “events that took place in 1988 which brought growing visibility to the United Farm Workers’ grape boycott in protest against pesticide poisoning” (Moraga 89). These events resulted in a national political response due to a discovered cancer cluster found in the San Joaquin Valley town of McFarland, California. Like McFarland, Moraga’s McLaughlin is populated by impoverished workers who dwell in homes resting on *poisoned land*. These homes are locales deemed unsafe. “Within a ten-year period from 1978 to 1988, a highly disproportionate number of children were diagnosed with cancer and were born with birth defects (Moraga 89).” Inspired from what she read and witnessed during this time in McFarland, Moraga’s central protagonist—Cerezita Valle—was created.

Valle represents one of those persons Moraga recalls who is born with birth defects and a damaged body. Born *without* limbs, Cerezita signifies the principle that all persons cannot be explained or defined by a natural-scientific philosophy. Her body is constituted in the form of a machine named as a raite. Such a body requires us to reconsider “those boundaries of bodily life” with the intention of defining what bodies matter and what life is worth living. Such thinking suggests that humans perhaps may have *alternative bodies that matter*. We will then find it useful to think about Cerezita’s damaged body and the manner in which she overcomes her disfigurement—her disability. I argue that Cerezita’s development, of what Gloria Anzaldúa calls, the *new mestiza consciousness* rejects and therefore complicates the notion of her as, what Julia Kristeva names, *abject*. To further illustrate my argument, I will provide an explanation of what this consciousness signifies for Cerezita and the Latino immigrant farm worker community.

In the play Cerezita’s family, particularly her mother—Dolores—readily comments on the unnamed source that uses pesticides on their community’s land. Overtime, locals grow to suspect that these pesticides cause the land to become poisoned. This poisoning has direct relation to Cerezita. Whenever the poisoning occurs, Dolores and the Valle family are reminded of Cerezita’s body—or lack thereof. While every Valle family member becomes, according to Dolores, poisoned or damaged, Cerezita is a special case in that she is born damaged. Because of her birth abnormalities, she receives a great amount of sympathy and pity from her family and neighbors. This communal recognition of her damaged body—that which she is incapable of claiming as her own—marks it/her as disabled. In Pablo Mitchell’s important work titled *Coyote Nation: Sexuality, Race, and Conquest in Modernizing New Mexico, 1880-1920*, he relates the discussion of bodies and ‘bodies that matter’ to what he refers to as “bodily comportment” (5). He argues that one’s bodily comportment signals their position in a community’s social structure.

“[T]he human body’s entrances and exits, protrusions and blemishes, incapacities, shames, triumphs, failures, and desires” create and relate to a kind of societal order (5). With regards to Cerezita, her “blemish, incapacity, shame, or failure” is always connected to her damaged body. In her case Mitchell’s notion reveals how disability is viewed as a unique version of bodily comportment.

Her disability—the damaged body—signifies bodily comportment. She is strapped to a raite (a machine) which limits her mobility; she is entirely dependent on it. Moreover, Cerezita lacks a sense of control over her body, given that it is inseparable from the raite. *The body and the machine are indistinguishable*. Her control is only possible by the movement of her chin which enables her to move about but only in an inelastic way. Due to such limits, she is regarded by her family and the community as useless or unbefitting.

Throughout the play, Cerezita’s bodily condition publicly marks her as one who is damaged and delegitimized due to strict reliance on the raite. She therefore embodies Julia Kristeva’s notion of ‘the abject’. In summary Kristeva theorizes the abject as one who is situated in between the concept of ‘the object’ and the concept of ‘the subject’. Cerezita’s position as abject is most recognizable when she is mobile. We find that the family consistently refers to the sound of her raite (an object) as Cerezita (the subject). The sound of the machine, in other words, denotes Cerezita. Therefore, they have come to interpret the machine to be an extension of the subject. Her identity is transformed from subject to object. The family still communicates with her, which is evidence that she is still viewed as a subject. Within the domestic space, she most often is abject. Her identity is strictly related to her body which establishes her as abject.

One’s bodily comportment, according to Mitchell, has often been used as a way to (de)legitimize one’s citizenship. While he defines citizenship in two distinct ways, citizenship, in

relation to Cerezita's narrative, specifically addresses it as a form of belonging. Mitchell explains that this definition of "citizenship [is] beyond a strictly legalistic interpretation" (6). It is broader and encompasses a full membership in a society. He goes further to suggest,

This understanding of citizenship can vary based on the setting and historical context, but at its core views citizens as those members of a society who command respectful and dignified treatment in the most basic aspects of their lives: choice of occupation, residence, choice of spouse or sexual partner, style of noncoercive personal pleasure. Those with power and authority in certain settings...treat such individuals, such as citizens with care, rather than suspicion and alarm. Citizenship, according to this broader understanding, describes those individuals that society values and protects. (6)

This definition of citizenship directly applies to Cerezita's position as a *member-less subject* among the McLaughlin community. She is incapable of commanding respect and dignified treatment and withheld from the aforementioned basic aspects of human dignity and life. Her community gazes at her with suspicion. Her status is one who is subordinate, not valued by el pueblo Latino.

Since she does not constitute as a citizen, according to the previous definition, and is referred to as being abject, damaged or poisoned, Dolores denies Cerezita the right to go outside of the interior of the domestic space. Since she is regarded as illegitimate, her mother fears the judgment that others may have of Cerezita if they see her. Because seeing her would require acknowledging her existence then making a judgment about her and considering her role in their society. Cerezita's inability to leave the domestic space reminds us of her limited mobility and how it influences her status within the family and among the community.

Cerezita is often depicted in the text as looking outside of her bedroom window. This window serves as her only ability to personally connect with any existence on the exterior of her space. The window therefore serves as a metaphorical representation of *a borderland*. It is an American borderland if we also take into account the relationship between the metaphorical representation and the geographical location of the bedroom window. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa defines a borderland as “a dividing line...a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary...The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (25). As for the borderland that Cerezita inhabits, the window serves as a divide/border between Cerezita’s subject-position and her access to the normative society. Her inability to cohabitate with the McLaughlin Latino citizens suggests she is prohibited and forbidden. Given she is without a voice and there is no recognition for the existence of her lived life, we could further understand Cerezita’s subject-position as *subaltern*.

Although restricted by a borderland, Cerezita locates agency through her head, her mind, and her consciousness, which is vastly different from anyone else. Cerezita’s consciousness is connected to an obsession with ancient spirituality and the reverence for honoring deities, including the Virgin of Guadalupe. Her consciousness can be best understood in relation to what Anzaldúa claims as *the new mestiza consciousness*. Anzaldúa suggests the new mestiza consciousness (or *una conciencia de mujer*) is “an ‘alien’ consciousness in the making” (99).

Successful in her escape from the domestic space, she is exposed for the first time to the farm workers who at the time are violently protesting against the poisoning. Dressed as the Virgin of Guadalupe, a symbol of ethnic identity, rebellion, and tolerance for ambiguity (Anzaldúa 52)—she ceases the uproar and a sudden sense of calming rests over them. She takes the stage before the workers and proclaims,

Put your hand inside my wound. Inside the valley of my wound, there is a people. A miracle people. In this pueblito where the valley people live, the river runs red with blood; but they are not afraid because they are used to the color red. It is the same color as the river that runs through their veins, the same color as the sun setting into the sierras, the same color of the pool of liquid they were born into... You are Guatemala, El Salvador. You are the Kuna y Tarahumara. You are the miracle people too, for like them the same blood runs through your veins. The same memory of a time when your deaths were cause for reverence and celebration, not shock and mourning. You are the miracle people because today, this day, that red memory will spill out from inside you and flood this valley con coraje. And you will be free. Free to name this land *Madre*. Madre Tierra. Madre Sagrada. Madre...Libertad. The radiant red mother...rising. (Moraga 148)

This language suggests that Cerezita, as a *mestiza*, creates a new consciousness (Anzaldúa 102) from the borderland (her window), while she observes the pesticide poisoning and el pueblo's outcry. Such a consciousness leads her to create a 'new mythos'. This mythos, according to Cerezita, is a change in the way the community should perceive reality, the way they see themselves, and the way they behave. Evidence of this transformation is in the monologue when she refers to el pueblo as "miracle people" and establishes their community as having derived from the same blood. Anzaldúa writes, "We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls (107)." This consciousness, the new mythos provokes her to become a unifying figure for the community.

For most of Cerezita's life, she lacks power—political or otherwise. Being without limbs, she is a prisoner within her own home. Her head, however, provides her the ability to speak, to

listen, and to think. It is no coincidence that Moraga refers to Cerezita as “the head” and states that she is “a head of human dimension” (Moraga 90). Her head can then be regarded as the source for her development of the new mestiza consciousness. Such a consciousness makes all the difference for her: legitimizing her ‘being,’ her life as worth living, her life as worth protecting, her life as worth saving, and her life as worth grieving.

There is great irony in a bodiless person like Cerezita—most often regarded as embodying abjection to the extent of subaltern status in her community—becoming the hero/saint figure that unites el pueblo at the end of the play. Despite such epistemological, ontological, and even oncological atrocities, Cerezita calls for her Latino community – through the act of unification and collective revolution – to reclaim their “home” and insist on the unnamed source to stop the violent unregulated use of pesticides. In her unforgettable monologue, Cerezita reminds el pueblo that they have always been damaged bodies living on poisoned land. Her public address calls for her oppressed community to realize the political injustice that is killing their people (the physical), their futures (the mental), and their consciousness (the ecstasy).

*Heroes and Saints* was written as a play with the intention to be performed. Examining performance as it relates to affect, José Esteban Muñoz’s essay titled “Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho’s *The Sweetest Hangover*” leads to a meaningful concluding point. He states that there is a notion regarding “...emotion’s being the signification of human reality to the world” (208). He also refers to Cherrie Moraga’s poem titled “Dreaming of Other Planets” and attests that “dreaming of other planets” represents the type of utopian planning, scheming, imaging, and performing we must engage in if we are to enact other realities, other ways of being and doing within the world” (208). Like her poem, the play dreams not only of other spaces but

of other modes of perceiving reality and feeling the world. While Moraga dreams of other ways of seeing, her play instructs its audience in other ways of feeling: feeling disabled (212).

In Cerezita's final monologue she calls the now disabled community of Latinos to dream and believe in their perception of reality and "feeling the world." The characters are not only motivated by their brownness but also by their disabilities. They both act as ways for Cerezita and others to "dream of other planets." For Cerezita, this is enhanced by a consciousness that enables her to become the voice and the body of *el pueblo*. In this 'becoming' she establishes her 'body' as one that matters, one that references the abject or illegitimate body as viable—which ultimately challenges the symbolic hegemony. She reclaims her identity, *el pueblo's* identity, and their collective home.



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## Fashioning Disability, Creating (In)Visibility in Alexander McQueen's "No. 13"

### *Introduction*

Fashion is often stereotyped as frivolous and superficial. Critics of fashion argue that it artificially categorizes persons and creates an identity hierarchy on the basis of appearance/sense of being, gender/sex identity, femininity/masculinity, and class status. With regards to femaleness, high-fashion designers of luxury brands are especially criticized for enforcing a particular standard of bodily attractiveness. Some argue they do so through the use of *biopower*. Michel Foucault describes biopower to be the manner or mechanism by which a state regulates bodies and thus determines which bodies are 'fit,' which bodies 'matter,' and which bodies are representative of the state. I understand the high-fashion industry to operate like a state, enacting biopower as a means to determine which bodies are appropriate and acceptable for high-fashion. They are the enforcers of the artificial hierarchization of bodies and identities.

We can find evidence of this at work in public statements made by Karl Lagerfeld, the head designer and creative director of the French fashion house Chanel and the Italian fashion house Fendi. Joanna Douglas reports in an interview with *Focus* that Lagerfeld stated, "No one wants to see curvy women. You've got fat mothers with their bags of chips sitting in front of the television and saying thin models are ugly. Fashion is about dreams and illusions". In another interview with *Harper's Bazaar*, Lagerfeld claimed, "The body has to be impeccable...If it's not, buy small sizes and eat less food". Most recently, in a 2011 interview with *Metro* when he was asked what he thought of Adele, the British pop singer, Lagerfeld replied, "She is a little too fat, but she has a beautiful face and a divine voice". Such statements are representative of the way high-fashion designers and the industry use biopower as an aim to preserve petite female body and to present such body as the standard of bodily attractiveness.

Yet, other contemporary high-fashion designers, such as Alexander McQueen, may offer us new insight on how fashion is capable of redefining femaleness and femininity and reimagining which bodies matter. McQueen was a British fashion designer who entered the world of high-fashion in 1997 when he became the head designer and creative director for Givenchy, a Paris fashion house. Then, McQueen launched Alexander McQueen, his self-named high-fashion brand one year after his appointment with Givenchy and remained with his brand until his untimely death in 2010. McQueen was both praised and condemned throughout his career for his obsession with ‘ugliness’ and turning what is considered ugly into beautiful. In other words, he sought to make consumers of high-fashion reconsider what ‘beauty’ is. In his 1999 Spring/Summer collection entitled “No. 13,” McQueen was inspired by questions surrounding the idea of ‘the perfect body,’ and what transpired was a collection that aimed to celebrate bodily difference.

In his attempt to efface the idea of ‘the perfect(ed) body’ and highlight female bodily difference at the showing for this collection, McQueen featured Aimee Mullins, a double leg amputee Paralympics champion and model. Mullins wore a brown leather corset, cream silk lace skirt, and ‘prosthetic legs’ hand-carved from elm wood which were made to appear as ‘boots’. By not showing Mullins in a pair of sprinting legs (which she most often wore) and placing her neither at the beginning nor the end of the show, McQueen remarked that his aim was to have Mullins *blend in* with the other models. McQueen’s formulation of disability aesthetics in fashion by way of this collection deserves to be further considered.

Fashion connoisseurs, critics, and scholars often praise “No. 13” as one of McQueen’s most successful, if not the most successful, and provocative collections throughout his entire fashion career. Since his untimely death in 2010, there has been a great deal of attention focused

on McQueen and his work. Authors, curators, and documentarians have almost unanimously praised McQueen's contribution to fashion and often referred to him as the most influential person in recent fashion history. Despite the controversy and criticism he received throughout his career. Since his death, McQueen's "No. 13" has escaped any serious analysis or critique of his attempt to obstruct the standard of bodily attractiveness or the idea of 'the perfect body' in high-fashion. Scholars have not with any seriousness written an analysis of how successful McQueen was at showcasing bodily difference as a means for redefining female 'beauty,' specifically in relation to "No. 13". This is my intervention and the issue that I seek to address in this essay. While I am, like many others, a supporter of McQueen's fashion and artistic vision, I find weaknesses or limits in this particular collection with regards to the way Mullins was incorporated into the fashion show and the attention (or lack thereof) to her disability. Therefore, it is necessary to complicate "No. 13" and challenge McQueen on his incorporation of bodily difference with the intention to critique high-fashion's use of biopower. Although McQueen attempts to celebrate bodily difference by incorporating Mullins in his show, he also ironically perpetuates the idea of 'the perfect body'. I argue that the manner by which he dresses her in ornately designed 'legs' and places her in the middle of the show makes her disability (the bodily difference) both invisible and visible.

### *Invisibility of Mullins's Disability*

The manner by which Mullins' double leg amputation is *invisible* that protects her from being viewed as an "exotic" or a freak. In his discussion of the evolution of the freak show, Robert Bogdan writes that there emerged two distinct modes of presenting freaks: the exotic mode and the aggrandized mode. (The latter mode is mentioned later in my discussion of how McQueen also makes Mullins' body *visible*.) Bogdan writes, "The exotic mode emphasized how

different and, in most cases, how inferior the persons on exhibit were” (29). Exoticizing a person/freak means that the bodily difference is highlighted but not in a positive manner. Fashion show audiences are always in a position to interpret the models’ bodies in either of these two modes depending on the way that the designer presents his/her collection and organizes the show. Prior to showing “No. 13,” McQueen had been repeatedly criticized for exploiting and sensationalizing female models’ bodies in fashion shows. In the days leading up to the showing of “No. 13,” fashion critics had begun to learn about McQueen’s inclusion of Mullins as one of the models and publicly condemned him for exploiting her disability.

Although critics speculated the presentation of the collection to be something like a freak show, Mullins modeled the garments along with the other models. Introducing Mullins in a brown leather corset, cream silk lace skirt, and hand-carved elm wooden prosthetic legs most fashion buyers and critics argued that McQueen made every attempt to style Mullins to look like the other models. Furthermore, McQueen did not position her at the immediate beginning or the end as to suggest that she was unique or significant in some manner. These decisions were made in order to prevent the audience from interpreting Mullins as an exotic freak. This is confirmed in an interview that Andrew Bolton, a curator at The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, had with McQueen. Bolton asked McQueen how he aimed to incorporate Mullins into the collection, and McQueen stated, “When I used Aimee [Mullins] for [this collection], I made a point of not putting her in...sprinting legs [prostheses for running]...We did try them on but I thought no, that’s not the point of this exercise. The point is that she was to mould in with the rest of the girls” (221). McQueen’s desire for Mullins “to mould in” with the other models suggests that he sought to avoid exoticizing or sensationalizing Mullins and understood Mullins’ invisibility to be empowering.

If she were to, in McQueen's words, "mould in with the rest of the girls," *what should we make of Mullins's disability? If McQueen's purpose was to celebrate bodily difference and complicate high-fashion's obsession with 'the perfect body,' why not highlight Mullins's double leg amputation? Is it more or less empowering for her disability to be hidden and "pass" as nondisabled? Why incorporate Mullins into the show, if her bodily difference was to be made invisible? Why call her hand-carved elm wooden prostheses "legs" when they obviously resemble boots? By rendering her disability invisible, how do we interpret McQueen's contribution to an aesthetic of disability in fashion?* These are the questions that we must consider in thinking about the role Mullins plays in this fashion show and the way McQueen styled her. To complicate and challenge McQueen's showing of "No. 13," I want to offer a contrary analysis to the previous one. Although the previous analysis is commonly found in most works about McQueen after his death, I seek to complicate it and show the limits of making Mullins' disability invisible.

Reconsidering the way McQueen stylizes Mullins and how he discusses her in relation to the other models, I argue that these acts strip the disabled body from agency by way of its invisibility. McQueen suggested that he had hand-carved elm wooden prosthetic legs made for Mullins, and he refers to them as 'legs' in every interview. Also, fashion critics and scholars respect McQueen's language and also name them 'legs' in their work. However, it is obvious that these supposed 'legs' are made to look like 'knee-high 'boots''. They are ornately designed and feature a prominent square-heel. Mullins remarked in numerous interviews that they were uncomfortable and very difficult to walk in. Not only did they not appear like legs but they also did not fit Mullins in a way that made her feel like they were prosthetic legs that she was accustomed to wearing. By referring to them as legs, McQueen verbally acknowledges Mullins's

double-leg amputation but does not actually create legs that meet the purpose of the show which was to celebrate bodily difference. Her legs appeared as ‘boots’, and this is reaffirmed when even buyers who attended the show called McQueen’s representatives and requested to order a pair of the boots that Mullins wore. His attempt at celebrating bodily difference is undermined by featuring Mullins in a pair of prosthetic legs which were made to look like boots that fit in with the other models’ boots featured in the collection. A closer examination of these ‘boots’ reveals that there is no visual evidence or reference to human legs in McQueen’s design of the hand-carved elm wooden prostheses.

The design of these is again made to look like boots. Boots commonly require the presence of a person’s legs and feet to be inside the boots, but these prostheses are quite different. They are not made to fit Mullins’ “pretty legs,” so she is therefore required to remove these legs and supplement them with McQueen’s prosthetic legs. Making what he refers to as Mullins’ elm-wooden ‘prosthetic legs’ appear as anything other than a pair of knee-high boots removes any visual existence of prostheses from the show. The presentation of the boots provides further evidence that her body is made to appear ‘normal,’ eliminating the reality of her double-leg amputation. Such an elimination affords Mullins the opportunity ‘to pass’ as a nondisabled high-fashion model because McQueen’s design masks her disability. If he truly desired to celebrate bodily difference, one could argue that he could have incorporated Mullins into the show revealing her double-leg amputation in a non-exoticized and non-aggrandized manner. If his goal was to show various representations of bodily difference with the models, he could have simply presented Mullins’ body as it is naturally. Mullins’s boots mistakenly function to make her double-leg amputation invisible.

Although I do not conceive that McQueen's elm-wooden 'prosthetic legs' appear as such, I want to consider whether or not naming them 'prosthetic legs' meets his supposed goal with "No. 13". If the goal of the show is to celebrate bodily difference and critique the fashion industry's definition of 'the perfect body,' I reassert that it would have been more effective for McQueen to present Mullins' body as it appears without the intervention of technology. *Is she not 'fit' or worthy of wearing high-fashion Alexander McQueen garments as a woman without legs?* In Drew Leder's *The Absent Body*, he contends that the prosthetic is commonly "absent," or made transparent, in one's daily life as is the rest of their body. In other words, the prosthetic is not a point of focus: it is ideally indistinguishable from the subject and banal as the rest of the body. It is 'one' with the subject and does not become an object—it is then understood as a 'thing' that is placed 'on' or 'in' the disabled person—until the disabled person thinks or speaks of it as something different from the rest of their body which then highlights it as different or unique from the rest of their body. The presence or use of a prosthetic alone does not suggest that the disabled person recognizes their body to be discomposed. Presenting her to the show's audience with elm-wooden boots only advances the industry's standard of bodily attractiveness and perpetuates 'normalcy'.

Prosthetic legs, in general, help one to engage in the process of normalization. As Steven L. Kurzman suggests, "Artificial limbs do not *disrupt* amputees' bodies, but rather reinforce our publicly perceived normalcy and humanity...[A]rtificial limbs and prostheses only disrupt...what is commonly considered to be the naturally whole and abled Body" (380-1). The image of Mullins dressed in Alexander McQueen garments, especially the elm wooden boots, and walking in the show offers an image or (re)presentation of a disabled body that is made to appear normal. By wearing these boots, Mullins's disability is masked and passes as a high-



fashion, nondisabled model. “In a social context, artificial limbs are ideally invisible,” Kurzman argues, “in order to facilitate mimicry of nonamputees and passing as able-bodied,” but most “amputees are proud of their ability to walk well and pass” because “one’s ability to pass is most remarkable when people are aware of it” (379). Presenting herself in such a way may be liberating for Mullins, but it also problematically upholds the fashion industry’s ideal of the feminine female body. These boots offer Mullins to undergo a process of normalization which asserts that the ‘the perfect body’ *is not* an ideal to critique—but an ideal to admire.

The example of Mullins emphasizes that the disabled body can be potentially categorized as normal and is not strictly defined by its condition. Rather, it becomes what Foucault refers to as a “docile body”. In Foucault’s *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, he writes, “A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (136). If the body is docile, it is also inherently disciplined, and he understands normalization to be a process that is birthed from the existence of disciplines. Traditionally, a disabled body would not be considered equivalent to a nondisabled body based on its functional ability. He further suggests that “degrees of normality indicate membership of a homogeneous social body but also play a part in classification, hierarchization and the distribution of rank” (184). To put it more simply, a body that does not belong to the “homogeneous social body” is understood, according to the hierarchization, to be of a lower status, implying that it has little to no power and is therefore subject to isolation and/or discrimination.

In Foucault’s critique of the idea of ‘normal,’ it is important to note that he contends that such an idea is *unachievable*. One is never born ‘normal;’ consequently, the disciplined body is a false notion. It only functions to perpetuate a heightened internal insecurity that leads one to believe that s/he needs to self-correct serially. It is through the act of self-correction that one

ideally becomes more normal albeit never capable of obtaining full normalcy. This is true for the disabled body, too. The disabled body that is made docile embraces conformity which leads it to appear more 'normal'. Lennard Davis attests that "[w]e live in a world of norms," and the problem is that "normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person" (23-4). It is by this process of normalization that the disabled body must endure in order for nondisabled bodies to accept the disabled body as worthy.

McQueen's incorporation of Mullins into his show demonstrates the way that her disabled body is made to conform and becomes docile. Her body is "subjected, used, transformed, and improved". It is "subjected" to conform to the standard of what a high-fashion model is and must be able to do. They must be able walk on two legs and present the garments that the designer issues them to wear. In this latter sense Mullins' body is used in order to present McQueen's latest designs in a manner that "sells" the McQueen brand and garments. The hand-carved elm wooden 'boots' that Mullins wears during the show signifies the way her body is "transformed" from a state of incapability to a state of capability of walking in a fashion show. Her body is considered "improved," at least by the industry's standards, as a result of the boots, since they provide her the ability to walk. Mullins' body consequently becomes disciplined and docile. Through this process, such a body 'passes' as nondisabled, making the disability invisible.

Through the process of normalization, her disciplined and docile body is reinterpreted as acceptable and worthy of modeling McQueen's garments. The disciplined and docile body which is subjected to the industry's execution of biopower suggests the body is acceptable given the presence of two apparatuses that afford her/him to walk (whether that is achieved with prosthetic legs or boots). Every other representation or articulation of 'the body' is considered a deviation

from the norm and the industry's standard of bodily attractiveness. Mullins' disciplined and docile body is especially important for us to consider because it represents a norm and standard of bodily attractiveness that has never been previously disclosed to the fashion world. In the way that McQueen erases Mullins's disability, presenting a 'normal body' and bodily attractiveness, he also makes Mullins's disability *visible* and suggests that visibility is only achieved by virtue of fashioning it to appear as a normal body.

### *Visibility of Mullins's Disability*

I previously argue that McQueen makes her double-leg amputation *invisible*, but the manner by which he attempts to do this also makes her body *visible*, (which is initially evident with her "pretty legs"). McQueen's stylization of Mullins and her willingness to participate in the show provide evidence of a refusal to acknowledge or accept her disability. This refusal suggests a desire to reinterpret her body through fashion as 'normal'. Referring again to when McQueen stated that he wanted Mullins "to mould in with the rest of the girls," I contest that she is made into an "aggrandized freak". According to Bogdan, "[t]he aggrandized mode reversed [the exotic mode] by laying claim to the superiority of the freak" (29). Her disciplined and docile body is contrived as superior and rewarded for achieving what no other double-leg amputee has done in the history of fashion shows.

Mullins' redefined body—a body that moves from disabled to nondisabled and normal—also ironically reinforces the existence and visibility of her prostheses. This move rewards her conformity and transition to normalcy, even though Mullins actually lacks the physical ability which typically marks one as normal or able-bodied. In her discussion of the representation of females, in particular Heather Mills and Sarah Reinertsen, with prostheses in popular culture, Amanda K. Booher argues there is a double effect that occurs when one is positioned as normal

despite their lack of physical normalcy. The context of the fashion show and Mullins's participation in it is best understood in this double effect analysis. With Mullins, the double effect consists of how the audience sees a strong, healthy woman who is fully capable and goes beyond expectations of double-leg amputees which demonstrates that she is most identifiable with everyone else. However, the audience is "also reminded that the reason for this attention is precisely [her] amputation/prosthetic, that which inherently defines [her] as different, as Other, as outside of normal. [The audience], and others, note [her] tremendous bravery and achievement again because/in spite of their disability" (73). During McQueen's show, the audience clapped when Mullins walked, which marks her (in comparison to the other models) as different—or as Other.

There is a potential problem, however, that arises with regards to Mullins' disabled body reinterpreted as a 'normalized' body and superior to other double-leg amputees. Her superior body is an inaccessible representation for all disabled bodies, especially double-leg amputees, to obtain, considering Mullins's history as a Paralympian champion and her overall look sans her double-leg amputation and professional and social connections to various artists and designers. This reinterpretation falsely suggests that disabled bodies are capable of achieving a normalized status, and other female double-leg amputees are also capable of having "pretty legs". A disabled person is made to believe that s/he can be included into society and the fashion world as long as s/he disciplines her/his body or meets the expectations of nondisabled persons. This further reinforces the nondisabled body as the norm and the desirable. Mullins is regarded to be the norm for persons with prostheses, especially double-leg amputees. But this is problematic because reaching her level of normality requires equal access to capital and technology. By

making Mullins' disability simultaneously invisible and visible, she is positioned as the ideal or superior.

Mullins' body is situated to suggest that it represents the ideal form of femininity for disabled bodies. She represents an ambiguous, standard of femininity. From her head to torso, she signifies that standard. Her double-leg amputation is what differentiates her from the standard articulated by the fashion industry. Yet, her successful attempt to mask this amputation with boots removes the differentiation from human visual perception which thus positions her as an ambiguous, archetypal for fashion's preferred female form. The issue that arises here is McQueen's interest in aesthetics rather than disability. Based on the audience's initial perception of Mullins and the fact that many fashion buyers and consumers called in the next day to place an order for the boots proves that McQueen's inclusion of Mullins as the one true example of bodily difference in the show failed. Even if his intention was to provide her with prosthetic legs so her bodily difference could be represented and she could participate in a similar manner that the other models participate in the show, McQueen could have designed more functional and less intricately detailed prostheses. Rather, he subjects Mullins to the process of normalization by virtue of disciplining body to be docile in order for her to represent feminine femaleness. Mullins' body is as a result positioned to be interpreted as workable and adaptable which makes her the ideal disciplined/docile body. She is able and willing to conform to fashion's standards. McQueen does not highlight the variation of femininity and femaleness that he could have with this show, but instead subjects the females to homogenization as to present a singular articulation of feminine femaleness. This narrowed articulation of what constitutes as feminine and femaleness thus confirms that McQueen after all acts as an enforcer of biopower within the fashion industry as to perpetuate the notion of 'the perfect body'.

### *Conclusion*

McQueen's inclusion of Mullins in his 1999 Spring/Summer fashion show entitled "No. 13" aimed to celebrate bodily difference and critique the notion of 'the perfect body'. From the beginning of his career, he was obsessed with what society deems 'ugly' or 'unfit,' and he sought to design high-fashion clothing that would require audiences at his shows and consumers of his brand to rethink what 'beauty' is. Mullins's participation in McQueen's show theoretically seems to work in achieving this goal. However, the manner by which he executed the show and dressed Mullins suggests that he is embedded in the high-fashion system more than he would have cared to admit. While McQueen's intentions are to be praised, the hand-carved wooden 'prosthetic legs'/'boots' that Mullins wears and the way that he incorporates her into the show puts her disabled body in an ambiguous position. That is, McQueen makes her disability simultaneously invisible and visible.

Mullins's prosthetic legs-boots were neither commercial nor creative in the sense that they achieved the goal of celebrating bodily difference. Buyers desired to have them. Yet, such a demand creates a problem for both McQueen and Mullins. McQueen was incapable of selling them, since they were specially made for Mullins' body. Mullins's disability is made to appear as a commodity rather than what it is: a double-leg amputation. The ambiguity of the prosthetic legs-boots and McQueen's inclusion of Mullins to blend in with the other models makes her disability—her bodily difference that questions the notion of 'the perfect body'—invisible and visible which occurs by virtue of a process of normalization. Celebrating bodily difference may have been the goal but normalizing was the end result as is the case with all models in all high-fashion shows.

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## Fashioned Bodies in Trans/National Translation:

### Negotiating Queer Puerto Rican Identities in Mayra Santos-Febres's *Sirena Selena*

#### *Introduction*

A considerable amount of work has been dedicated to Mayra Santos-Febres's novel entitled *Sirena Selena*. This work has invoked scholars to continue exploring the intersections of gender, class, race, and sexuality in the Caribbean, specifically in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. In large part they have focused their analyses of the novel to address the capital and cultural exchange between Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic. In addition, they have explored the historical and ongoing racial tensions that continue to deepen the rift between the two nations. Both Selena and Martha—the two central trans protagonists—desire the Dominican Republic; it is the locale they believe will afford them opportunities to freely explore their trans bodies and, as a result, gain access to more capital. They have not, however, considered the significant roles that ‘fashion’ and ‘fashioning the body’ play with regards to their ability to safely cross the borders of these two nations in hopes of embarking on a journey of self-discovery, respectively.

Throughout the novel, their narratives are strikingly different, but they share a common thread. The commonality between their stories illuminates the struggle they have endured in attempt to live honestly and authentically. In these attempts to actualize these desired lives, both protagonists use ‘fashion’ as a means to partake in the act of ‘fashioning the body’ as a way to mediate their identities in various contexts and spaces. Based on their different experiences, the novel suggests that travel is associated with both risk and desire. As previously mentioned, the novel seeks for us to reexamine the way we think about the intersection of trans identity, fashion, and national borders within the Caribbean context. And it is through fashion, I argue, they

mediate their bodies in relation to place, and it is through fashion that both risk and desire are resolved in their pursuit of translating their trans/national Caribbean bodies and identities.

Selena and Martha's trans bodies are both 'interpellated' and 'interpreted' by others in a variety of social environments that they engage in. Both interpellation and interpretation often occur in the novel's detailed descriptions of the characters' (both trans and non-trans identified) mode of fashion and fashioning their bodies. Borrowing from Louis Althusser, I refer to interpellation in a similar manner as he does in his widely recognized essay titled "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses". In this essay he argues that interpellation commonly happens in a multitude of settings like the street. The process of interpellation begins by the seductive way ideologies confront people and proffer a particular identity or role. Since these identities and roles are proffered in every social environment, or even applied by culture, they are rendered in a way that encourages us to accept them (1355-61). Interpretation, on the contrary, can be best understood in the manner by which the characters explain or understand their own and each others' bodies and modes of fashion and fashioning their bodies. For this novel, the central difference between the use of these two important concepts is that the former illustrates the way people or culture attempts to ascribe identities and/or roles to another person. Whereas, the latter describes the way people explain or understand another person. Through the act of translation, we can learn how the protagonists' trans identities are in motion by way of fashion and fashioning their bodies. I conceptualize translation to be a continuum of 'transformation'. Whereas transformation suggests an act of completion, translation refers to an ongoing process. A successful translation in the novel takes place when one's identity is interpellated and interpreted by others in a manner that corresponds with the way they self-identify. Later in the essay, I will discuss how in the Dominican context Selena's identity translates but Martha's fails

to do so which is largely due to the protagonists' unique ways of fashioning their respective bodies.

The important role that fashion plays in both the protagonists' lives is highlighted in the beginning of the text when they are aboard the plane destined for the Dominican Republic. Martha reminds Selena that "image is everything. If you look like a professional, you are a professional" (15). Upholding her claim on professionalism, Martha purchases an Yves St. Laurent shirt for Selena to wear for the flight and first interview at Hotel Conquistador (15). Yves St. Laurent is a high-fashion brand from Paris. By wearing this item of clothing, Selena's identity is marked as professional and upper-class. The importance of the brand of this shirt suggests that access to high-fashion and their class status have a relationship with one's ability to easily cross borders. As for Martha's personal execution of professionalism, we are informed that her make-up and nails are done in an understated but sophisticated tone as to appear as a "mujer elegante" (elegant woman) (13) with a "unified body" (12). Adopting an "elegant woman" persona whose body is "unified" reduces the body/identity confusion that trans persons are subjected to during the process of national translation. Fred Davis argues that

because clothing (along with cosmetics and coiffure) comprises what is most closely attached to the corporeal self—it frames much of what we see when we see another—it quite naturally acquires a special capacity to... 'say things' about the self... Dress [fashion], then, comes easily to serve as a kind of visual metaphor for identity and, as pertains in particular to the open societies of the West, for registering the culturally anchored ambivalences that resonate within and among identities. (25)

Throughout the novel, both Selena and Martha carefully choose a particular fashion and adopt a mode for fashioning their bodies in hopes that others will *see* and interpret them in the way that they respectively intend to be personified.

Fashion operates as a culturally-dictated code. Martha's choice to dress Selena in an Yves St. Laurent shirt, for example, illustrates how Martha imagines the Dominican cultural code. In the Caribbean context, particularly as the novel describes the Puerto Rico, trans identities are purposely marginalized and deemed as a dangerous threat to the rest of the nation's heteronormative population. Therefore, the unification of a trans body/identity will increase a person's chances of translating uncomplicatedly as to avoid potentially facing bodily violence. We can conclude based on the language from the novel that a trans person articulates a gender but not without it being heavily influenced by other social factors like class, race, and sexuality.

The protagonists' careful attention to the modes of fashion and fashioning the body are primarily motivated by their desire for capital. The novel begins with the scene of Selena, a fifteen year old drag queen performer, and Selena's mentor, Martha, aboard an airplane departing from Puerto Rico to the Dominican Republic. Their shared desire to travel to the neighboring island is realized because of Martha's prior arrangement for Selena to audition at Hugo Graubel's Hotel Conquistador in Santo Domingo. It is at this luxury hotel where Martha hopes to negotiate a contract with Graubel permitting Selena to perform. The success of this audition and contract negotiation are critical to both of them as to realize their desired futures. For Selena, the capital earned from this contract would afford her the opportunity to migrate to New York (which is never actually realized in the novel). The contract is equally important to Martha considering that she seeks to become a 'true female'—no longer needing to pass—by way of gender reassignment surgery.

Their individual desired outcomes from this short trip to the Dominican Republic affirm that they have an affinity to capitalism. For them, capitalism is the system that permits social transformations, such as relieving silenced and burdened populations like their own from oppressive sociopolitical regimes. Puerto Rico is referred to as the oppressive regime (given its political ties to the U.S.), and the Dominican Republic is interpreted by the protagonists as having a capitalist system that liberates bodies and identities. Even though Martha is exploiting Selena's body and talent in order to achieve both their desires and exploiting it for capitalistic gain, it is to the credit of Martha's devotion to Selena that makes the opportunity to leave Puerto Rico possible.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, Selena is depicted as a desperate prostitute whose subject position can be best understood as wretched. She struggles to avoid homelessness and to gain access through acceptance to a trans community. She spent her childhood cleaning wealthy homes, and her access to capital as an adult came from collecting cans and prostitution on the streets. Yet, through the monetary support and guidance from Martha, Selena's experience in the Dominican Republic is devoid from hustling and prostitution. Instead, it offers her a lifestyle of fortune and lavishness. In this locale, she is a high-fashioned drag performer who focuses on stylizing herself in an exquisite, fashionable manner. This is the means by which she successfully translates her Puerto Rican trans body/identity and drag performance in order to impress Graubel and obtain a contract to perform.

Traveling to the Dominican Republic also signals the trans/national protagonists' role as cross-cultural and –national designers. The Dominican Republic is the site where they imagine their dreams of upward class mobility and gender identity transformation are realized. Jorge Duany contends, "When people move across state borders, they enter not only a different labor

market and political structure but also a new system of social stratification by class, race, ethnicity and gender” (147). This neighboring island provides opportunities for them that Puerto Rico cannot. Debra A. Castillo reminds us that “since U.S. labor laws prevent exploitation of the underage [Selena] in her home country in a way that the more lax Dominican Republic would...ignore,” the latter therefore becomes the idealized site for them to negotiate their trans/national bodies/identities (14). The acts of travel and fashioning oneself in the novel provide the possibility for the protagonists to shift from a voiceless, marginalized subject position to a better subject position that grants them a voice and recognition as equal socio-cultural participants.

Selena’s true gender is not only negotiated through gender but also through class. Class is evident in Selena’s immense desire to leave Puerto Rico and go to the Dominican Republic. She remarks, “I’m not about to live as a mere kept woman. And I’m never, never going back to the streets” (47). While she desires to embody a female identity, Selena’s desire to do so is contingent on her ability to symbolize a certain kind of female who is both admired and affluent. Representing this kind of female is important for Selena because she ultimately seeks to gain upward class mobility, not to be a full-time female like Martha. Selena’s attention to fashion details in the manner that she fashions herself for a drag performance highlights the similarities between a trans character who acts female and a real or true female, such as Solange Graubel (or Señora), Hugo Graubel’s wife. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler attests,

The critical promise of drag does not have to do with the proliferation of genders...but rather the exposure or the failure of heterosexual [and heteronormative] regimes ever fully to legislate or contain their own ideals....At its best, then, drag can be read for the way in which hyperbolic norms are

dissimulated as the heterosexual mundane. At the same time these same norms, taken not as commands to be obeyed, but as imperatives to be ‘cited,’ twisted, queered, brought into relief as heterosexual imperatives, are not, for that reason, necessarily subverted in the process. (237)

The interesting point that Butler refers to in this passage is the way that drag is able to both de/stabilize the aesthetic norms placed on standard gender constructions. Drag allows for Selena ‘to be’ female but also ‘to reimagine’ femaleness. This is one way that the novel requires us to reconsider what it means to be a ‘true female’ and who is named such. It also asks us to consider the way that drag ‘translates’ across the Caribbean. Depicting a version of femaleness like Solange Graubel’s ultimately permits Selena’s trans/national body to translate within the Dominican context.

Contrary to Selena, Martha intends to live full-time as a female. The ultimate goal of this central trans protagonist is ‘to pass’. Martha is already presented in the novel as ‘a real lady’ (or “toda una señora”) who has breast implants and takes hormone medication in order to feminize her body more. Her main motivations for going to the Dominican Republic is (1) to launch Selena’s drag career which is believed to provide them with a substantial amount of capital, and (2) to fulfill her gender transition by having gender reassignment surgery. These two motivations are interconnected, in that the capital from Selena’s drag performances is needed in order to pay for the surgery. Without the surgery, Martha is concerned that she neither will ever think of herself as fully female nor will others perceive her to be ‘female’. The fear remains within her that there will be an instance when she will not successfully pass and someone will announce that she “is not a woman” (10). For Martha, being a true female means that the physicality matches the mentality. She contemplates, “Having the operation isn’t the same as dressing up—

this was something she knew deep within herself. To be able to take off her clothes and see herself, finally, from the waist below the same as from above the waist, with tits and candy. Together. To finally be able to rest in *a single body*” (10-1) (emphasis mine). It is only after gender reassignment surgery that Martha feels she can “rest in a single body”. Therefore, she currently self-interprets her ‘bodies’—one body represents the physical reality, whereas the other body represents the metaphysical fantasy—as engaged in a dialectic. Martha imagines that the surgery will complete her true female identity and permanently pass: this is specifically important because there are spaces, such as airports, where passing is mandatory in order to avoid violence.

Martha’s careful attention to fashion has much to do with her anxiety concerning her gender identity and the possibility of not passing as female. For Martha, the opportunities that travel provides her are entangled with a heightened state of anxiety which is caused by the harsh realities of border patrol regulation of both gender and tourism. Mark B. Padilla and Daniel Castellanos discuss how the Catholic Church actively encourages the Dominican state both to regulate and surveillance non-heteronormative foreigners/outsideers as to avoid any “threats to the moral integrity of the nation” (33). Kamala Kempadoo, in *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race, and Sexual Labor*, also suggests that “[i]n the Dominican Republic it has also been noted that sex workers and homosexuals are harassed and incarcerated for sexual behavior that breaches the law and transgresses social norms” (27). Therefore, take-offs and landings are especially filled with anxiety which Martha articulates when the flight prepares for take-off to Santo Domingo. Martha’s imagination creates the following horrific scenario which causes her great distress:

She trembled just thinking that someone, in the middle of takeoff, might point a finger at her and shout, ‘Look at that. That is not a woman.’ And they would turn



the aircraft around and force her from it, throwing her suitcases to the ground. Her bags would open, suddenly spewing high heels, gauze and tape, depilatory creams, and thousands of other cosmetic items, lending themselves, the bitches, as evidence. (10)

At this moment, Martha is solely identified as what she is not: “not a woman”. This places her in a precarious subject position within the Dominican context and into the domain of the untranslatable foreigner who exists beyond the recognized gender categories. The nation and the body both then become recognized as political entities: the gendered body attempts to gain authorization by a border patrol agent who is charged with the duty of guarding the nation’s borders from nationally recognized non-normative identities. In the novel, ‘fashion’ and ‘fashioning the body’ are sources which are understood to help secure a trans person’s identity. This permits the trans person, like Selena, to be a translatable foreigner whose body translates and is authorized as legitimate.

To further emphasize the importance of ‘fashion’ and ‘fashioning the body’ and their relationship to the trans/national body in *Sirena Selena*, I highlight another important scene where Martha ‘prepares’ Selena for her audition at Hotel Conquistador. Martha’s careful attention to detail offers insight to the way Martha perceives the Dominican Republic as a more elegant nation than Puerto Rico; therefore, the expectation is believed to be greater in terms of the performer’s appearance, so Martha aims to stylize Selena as what she imagines an upper-class Dominican female looks like. Santos-Febres details the complete process that Martha enacts as to prepare Selena for the audition. When she is finished with Selena, Martha remarks that her “disciple” was converted into “an elegant, demure female” (34). Referring back to Davis’s notion of ‘fashion’ as a culturally-dictated code, this scene from the novel again suggests

how Martha conceives of the Dominican cultural code as more supreme, or with higher expectations, than the Puerto Rican's code.

While Martha may 'self-fashion her body,' I also wish to consider the ways that Selena's body is fashioned by others as neither male nor female but as embodying the fantastical, mythical trope of many Caribbean trans characters. There is considerable attention spent to describing and commenting on Selena's rare, unique body throughout the novel. She is described as having a beautiful body and as someone who appeared to be "perfect to everyone" (168). One of her admirers compliments Selena for having a mouth like "a piece of fruit" (5). Selena's most passionate admirer and lover, Hugo Graubel, believes that she is like a "being of fantasy" (45). Solange Graubel remarks that Selena "really seems to be from another world" (173). She further fashions Selena's body by calling her a "freak" and "monster" (103) and even later refers to her as an "animal" (173). There is agency in fashioning one's body, as we realize in Martha's narrative, but agency with regards to mutual acknowledgment of one another's humanity has potential to be threatened by others' fashioning one's body. This latter point is evident in the account of Selena in the Dominican Republic with the ways that Hugo and Solange describe her. Even calling her "beautiful" and "perfect" initially read as high compliments, but the context and style by which they are delivered to Selena reasserts us that those "compliments" also dehumanize her. As we witness with Selena, the act of 'fashioning the body' can potentially cause epistemological and physical violence.

Martha, however, comments on Selena's identity throughout the novel and suggests that Selena is most successful in self-realization when she is in drag performing. On the other hand, it is when Selena is performing drag that she is referred to as a fantastical, seductive figure. José Esteban Muñoz helps us to understand Selena's narrative in this sense as a "reconstructed

narrative of identity formation”. He describes this formation as one “that locates the enacting of self at precisely the point where the discourses of essentialism and constructivism short circuit”

(6). In other words, Selena reconstructs her femaleness during these moments of drag performance because she does not recognize herself as either a ‘true female’ or a seductive, fantastical figure.

Selena’s drag performance however relies on her presenting a version of femaleness that is not entirely ‘female’ but not entirely divorced from standard characterizations of ‘femaleness’. Butler suggests that “becoming real, becoming a real woman...constitutes the site of the phantasmatic promise of a rescue...The [drag performance]...involves the phantasmatic attempt to approximate realness, but it also, exposes the norms that regulate realness as *themselves* phantasmatically instituted and sustained” (18). Selena’s fashioning of her body combines Selena’s creative approach to ‘femaleness’ that signifies both ‘true femaleness’ and an imagined ‘femaleness’. According to Selena, she fashions her body to articulate ‘true’ and ‘spectaclized femaleness’. In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler suggests that “the body is not understood as a static and accomplished fact, but as an aging process, a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone” (29). As I have previously suggested, others also recognize her as a fantastical, non-human figure. In the case of Selena, the novel acknowledges how the body is always reinterpreted by others which can instigate a kind of mind/body split or metaphysical bodily detachment. This is to mean that such detachment can lead one to only understand her/himself through “the eyes of others”.

Another important way that the discourse of fashion can help us to understand the number of complexities for which the novel addresses is to consider how there is an element of

‘fashioning the nation’. In ‘fashioning the nation,’ I want to elucidate the manner that Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic are fashioned as ‘trans’ locales. They do not appear as they are really are. Or, another way of expressing this is to say that each locale offers an experience different from what is imagined. Based on the sleek trans/national exchange that occurs between these neighboring islands, the binary construction of them as the developing world/Latin America/Dominican Republic and developed world/U.S./Puerto Rico needs challenged.

Selena becomes closely aligned with the Dominican Republic even to the extent that I understand her as a newly formed embodiment or translation of the nation. Meanwhile, Martha remains associated with Puerto Rico. In the Dominican context, Martha is only capable of passing as both female and Puerto Rican. In this sense then, Martha is aligned with the developed world, whereas Selena is oppositely depicted as the developing world. As a metaphor for the developed world, Martha symbolizes the precarious, ambiguous position that Puerto Rico represents given its relationship with the U.S. and Latin America. She is the displaced, untranslatable trans/national trans body. Even though Martha may be representative of the developed world/Puerto Rico by virtue of being politically attached to the U.S., it is Selena’s body that translates seamlessly to the Dominican context. This enables Selena to metaphorically leave her wretched past in Puerto Rico in the periphery of her memory and execute a trans identified life that afford her the upward class mobility that she has always desired.

However, Martha is incapable of doing so. As mentioned earlier in the essay, Martha’s trans/national body/identity is ‘untranslatable’. She becomes as a result symbolic of the marginalized and disavowed in the Dominican Republic due to restraints that are encouraged by representatives from various Dominican social institutions. Padilla and Castellanos cite an excerpt from the Associated Press that states what Dominican Cardinal Nicolás de Jesús López

Rodríguez proclaims about “homosexuals”. The Cardinal remarks, “They [homosexuals] should stay in Europe and the United States. We don’t need that social trash” (35). While the Cardinal specifies “homosexuals” in this particular excerpt, it is clear from reading a culmination of his statements that he desires to rid the nation of all non-heteronormative gender and sexual identified persons. This excerpt tells us that not only is Martha’s body/identity ‘untranslatable,’ but, by being so, her subject position is denigrated to be of no more value than “social trash”. It makes sense that Martha is ‘untranslatable’ in the Dominican context considering Martha is aligned with Puerto Rico/U.S.—the “social trash”.

The book cover design exhibits the relationship within the narrative between ‘body’ (the arms), ‘fashion’ (the magenta-colored elbow-high gloves), and location (the tropical background that is depicted by the sun, the colorful, seductive sky, and green flora which is reminiscent of stereotypical characterizations of the Caribbean). Both Martha and Selena desire the Dominican Republic. For them, it is a nation they believe will afford them opportunities for freely living out their trans bodies meanwhile gaining access to more capital. Their success in crossing trans/national borders depends largely on their ability to fashion their bodies in ways that meet the expectations and standards of the Dominican Republic’s body politic. Negotiating who they were, who they are, and who they desire to become is what these protagonists’ are repeatedly confronted by as they attempt to make a better life for themselves.

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## Commodification of Female Beauty and the Queer Body in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dog eaters*

### *Introduction*

Jessica Hagedorn's 1990 novel entitled *Dog eaters* introduces readers to a myriad of narratives uniquely connected to the Philippines. The novel is set in postcolonial Philippines and depicts lives within the Filipino, American, and/or European frameworks from the mid-1950s through the 1980s. This time period is historic in Filipino society, since these years were devoted to nation-building and martial law under President Ferdinand Marcos; Marcos officially ruled the Philippines from 1965-1986. Hagedorn manages to elucidate native, diasporic, and transnational characters' narratives, as well as describe in immense detail their interactions, rather discursive for some, and experiences in the Philippines under Marcos rule. With careful consideration of the time period, Hagedorn provides a critical and valuable sociohistorical and sociopolitical foundation for readers to gain a comprehensive understanding for ways the native, the foreigner, the rich, the poor, the 'white,' the 'brown,' the heterosexual, the homosexual, the queer, the men, the women, and the transwomen may have lived under martial law. Martial law was declared by President Marcos in 1972, and, as Hagedorn reveals, it radically altered the Filipino cultural landscape, such as in regards to foreign media access.

Written in a postmodern narrative style, Hagedorn organizes the novel by assembling narratives non-chronologically, news streams, scripts, historical documents, letters, dreams, and speeches. Stylistically, the novel is a montage of fantasies and illusions of Filipino society. Indicative of the cultural landscape of the Philippines, *Dog eaters* reveals characters who communicate in an array of languages, including English, Spanish, and Tagalog. Characteristic of a postmodern-esque style, *Dog eaters* features two narrators: Rio Gonzaga and Joey Sands. Each narrator characterizes the native Filipino lived experience as they navigate in, around, and



out of Manila's urban landscape. Rio and Joey share their personal struggles, which they largely deal with the negotiation of their racial, class, gender, and sexual identities. They are distressed by others' interpretation of their identities as being seen as 'the exoticized Other,' even in their home nation. Stephen Hong Sohn, in "From Discos to Jungles: Circuitous Queer Patronage and Sex Tourism in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dog eaters*", contends that Hagedorn finds sexuality as the one common theme between the narrators. In a colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial context like the Philippines, race, class, gender, and sexuality are inseparable identity categories. Therefore, it is more accurate and meaningful for us to refer to all four of these themes as common and always present in both of Rio and Joey's narratives.

Both narrators, at times indirectly, speak to how the aforementioned themes have influenced their modes of thinking about themselves and their respective pasts, their presents, and their futures. In "Gender, Language, and Identity in *Dog eaters*: A Postcolonial Critique, Savitri Ashok writes,

If the imperialist patriarchy justified its colonizing endeavors by presenting the conquered as the different, savage inferior and exotic other, nationalism involves a concerted attempt at the recovery of manhood lost in colonization, projecting *woman as the other, to be gazed at, tamed, conquered, and enjoyed*. Nation building in postcolonial Philippines becomes a search for recovering a lost masculinity for the indigenous men of power. (1) (emphasis mine)

Rio and Joey are subjected to external commodification of ideologies pertaining to their bodies/identities. Rio describes a coming of age narrative; meanwhile, Joey describes a survival narrative. For Rio, she struggles with the colonial commodification of female gendered beauty through cinema by U.S. imperialism. Yet, Joey struggles with neocolonial commodification of

his queer sexualized body through the dancehall, specifically CocoRico, by foreign, mostly Western, sex tourists who are an alternate, masked version of imperialist powers.

With the exception of the elite and government forces, the entire nation suffered as a result of martial law, most of Hagedorn's central characters' distinct narratives converge at different 'spaces' within the landscape—the 'urban jungle'—or the capital city of Manila. Even though this period of time was very repressive on the surface and contained an excessive amount of corruption, she remarks that pornography became a part of everyday life. Yet, Marcos and his regime attempted to present the nation and its people as "squeaky clean" (Bonetti). It has been where "modern and pre-modern views coexist[ed]. It [has been] a...metropolis, overcrowded with smiling faces, affluent compounds, seedy nightclubs, old churches, sex shows, savory dishes, exotic smells, blaring pop songs and squatters" (Gener). "*Dog eaters* foregrounds the connections and discontinuities," as Maria Zamora writes, "between a diasporic location and the Filipino nationalism that emerges as a consequence of (and challenge to) Spanish colonialism (16<sup>th</sup> century—1986), U.S. colonialism (1902—World War II), and neo-colonial law (1954—1972)" (168). It is a landscape where the native and national identities attempt to divulge themselves despite the nation's extensive history under primarily American and European colonial rule. Hagedorn's *Dog eaters* is a complex novel that is designed with the intention to deliver an integral portrait of *resistance and identities-in-difference*. The novel requires us to struggle along with the characters and with the complexity of the Philippines, suspending in between postcolonial and postmodern frameworks.

*Analysis of Rio Gonzaga*

Like their Philippine nation, Rio and Joey are objectified, commodified, and exoticized and attempted to bring under complete physical and ideological control. First, the space that Rio experiences (post)colonial commodification is at the cinema. As the novel opens in the mid-1950s, we are introduced to Rio and her cousin, Pucha, at the cinema where they watch *All That Heaven Allows*. Taking from her highly controversial and landmark essay entitled “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey argues that “there are erotic ways of looking and spectacle” (2084). Moreover, “[a]s an advanced representation system, the cinema poses questions about the ways the unconscious (formed by the dominant order) structures ways of seeing and pleasure in looking” (2085). When one attends the cinema, there is the attendee has one primary function: observe the images. As evidenced by Rio’s particular experience, I understand the cinema to be a *voyeurscape*. By that name, I suggest that the cinema acts as a space where observing is its primary purpose. Mulvey continues explaining that “the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium...and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation...The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect” (2086-7). Such a voyeurscape allows Rio to participate both silently and discreetly by gazing at the American film actresses and admiring their ‘beauty’.

The cinema is a psychologically dangerous space for Rio as she is coming of age and eager to pronounce her female beauty. Yet, the Hollywood films that she is exposed present beauty in a form and color that she believes is iconic of female gendered beauty. However, she eventually recognizes that she is not this kind of ‘female’. As a voyeurscape, the cinema operates as space where a (post)colonial commodification of female gendered beauty is discursively emphasized. As a result, Rio represents the kind of female who remains psychologically

submissive and colonized by the more dominant force—the U.S. Inside the voyeurscape, Rio dreams of herself as one of the actresses in various Hollywood films. Rio even confesses her admiration for one of the actresses: Gloria Talbott. She admires Gloria’s “brash style” and “casual arrogance seems inherently American, modern, and enviable” (Hagedorn 4). Referring to her as “inherently American” suggests that Rio recognizes a great dichotomy between the ‘beauty’ that she and Gloria embody. She confuses cinematic events with personal events, dreams and memories. As a result, she attempts to produce herself in the image of someone else’s desire. In this instance, the ‘other desire’ is female gendered beauty as it has been historically produced and shown from Hollywood, Hagedorn describes Rio as erotically looking at the Hollywood actresses on the big screen. It becomes a solitary spectacle.

As Rio returns to the cinema throughout the novel, it becomes clear she is challenged with accepting her own form of female beauty. This level of acceptance is difficult as she continues to exoticize the spectacle of the Hollywood actress each time she returns to the cinema. In her deep admiration for their beauty, Rio concedes power to a form of U.S. imperialism. When she and Pucha go to watch *A Place in the Sun*, Rio announces to Pucha that even if she fails to understand the film, she will still ‘like’ it (15). Moreover, she becomes allured by the image of Elizabeth Taylor. Rio describes her “breathtaking face...imploring a forbidden kiss. They [Elizabeth and Montgomery] are drunk with *their own beauty and love, that much I understand. Only half of Elizabeth Taylor’s face is visible*—one violet eye, one arched black eyebrow framed by her short, glossy black hair. *She is glowing, on fire in soft focus*” (16) (emphasis mine). Although she fails to develop any significant meaning from these descriptive images in relation to herself, her beauty and her location in the Philippine nation, Rio acknowledges that it is “their own beauty...that much I understand. The manner by which these

films act as spectacles for Rio is affirmed by how she yearns to see more of Taylor's "glowing" face. Female gendered beauty is a (post)colonial commodification that Filipina women like Rio struggle to identify with, but they valorize it. We witness how Hollywood films within the voyeurscape, for example, function as a mechanism to keep the (former) colonized mind subordinate to the dominant colonial force(s).

### *Analysis of Joey Sands*

Whereas Rio experiences the commodification of female beauty, Joey Sands encounters commodification by way of his queer sexualized body. For him, being objectified, commodified, and exoticized is not prevalent anywhere else as much as it is within the dancehall scene, specifically CocoRico. Hagedorn describes CocoRico as a popular dancehall that is frequented by a variety of patrons: heterosexuals, homosexuals, and queers. It is a space for locals and foreigners to enjoy an upbeat atmosphere and popular music (72). Owned and operated by Andres Alacran, it is a business establishment that he opens with the intentions of gaining access to capital by providing a space for locals 'to consume' and dance. Joey's experiences at CocoRico reveal it as something far more salacious and dangerous—a space that functions as a hotbed for consuming and selling illegal substances and queer sex tourism. Hagedorn depicts CocoRico as the space in Manila for which foreigners, primarily Western male sex tourists who seek out sexual pleasure with younger queer Filipino men. Their bodies are, as a result, objectives of an exoticized desire. CocoRico could therefore be viewed as a *queer tourist landscape*.

Naming it a queer tourist landscape, I understand CocoRico to be originally designed as a landscape for all Filipinos to indulge in legal activities, such as consuming beverages and dancing. But as transnational capital more readily found its way into the urban Manila landscape

and foreign male sex tourists traveled to Manila for work, CocoRico – due to its ideal location and superior reputation – predominately becomes a queer tourist landscape. In this context a tourist landscape is a space constructed through a myriad of transformative processes – mostly of which are material but also allegorical – of an originally constructed landscape in order to best serve and meet tourists’ interests and desires. Recognizing the significant monetary contribution that foreign men made, Andres not only welcomed them but catered to their desires. In “Tourism-Terrorism: The Landscaping of Consumption and the Darker Side of Place,” Sally Ann Ness writes that tourist landscapes “are not...to be understood as inherently peaceful or innocent places simply because they assert idyllic narratives and because their clientele do not typically engage in acts of overt hostility or aggression. They must be recognized as sites that can emplace potentially enraging experiences of acute loss as well as pleasurable experiences of leisure” (121). As a result of these foreign male patrons, I seek to expand Ness’s notion even further to suggest that CocoRico is a seductive cultural landscape but more so as a queer tourist landscape.

In order to meet the interests and desires of the foreign male sex tourists of CocoRico, Andres is pressured and willingly concedes to forfeiting his dancehall landscape become dominantly “remodeled” as a landscape where queer sexual activity flourishes. As Andres is increasingly exposed to transnational capital by these men, he invites illicit activities to occur. Although he does not publicize CocoRico as such a space, he does not dismiss the sex tourists’ contribution to his business. A great proportion of the dancehall population, as Hagedorn writes, is made up of queer gendered or sexual bodies. This queer tourist landscape is inundated by the foreign male sex tourists who act as neocolonial, dominant forces set out to ‘conquer’ the bodies of local Filipino men.

There are discreet dangers with this lifestyle, such as ‘invisibility’. Since queer bodies have historically been kept ‘invisible’ and marginalized, the extent to which sex tourism operates as a form of neocolonial imperialism is ignored. Joey, for example, is a queer sexual subaltern. Taking from Antonio Gramsci’s theory of ‘the subaltern,’ he describes subalterns as representative of a group of people who are marginalized and overpowered by a dominant power structure commonly referred to as the ‘hegemony’. Due to Joey’s non-normative sexual identity, he is repressed. When Joey interacts with sex tourists, the dichotomy of their social positions is even further elucidated. Within the context of *CocoRico*, I regard the foreigners as the hegemony, since they occupy a dominant position in Manila, specifically the dancehall, due to their excess capital. “Queer prostitution in connection to sex tourism provides a specific avenue to subjectivity, an existence rendered through the enthralling combination of erotic desire and commodification...Conversely, Joey’s clients are able to come into a form of subjectivity through the deployment of financial capital” (Sohn 325). Joey states, “When the festival ends next week, you and the others will fly back to your countries and remember our hospitality with such fondness...We’ll all still be here, of course...nothing will change” (Hagedorn 135). This ultimately leads to mutual recognition between himself and the sex tourists.

As a prostitute, Joey’s identity is interlaced with the ‘consumption’ of non-normative sexualized bodies as commodities. “Hagedorn’s postmodern vision of the Philippines is one in which everything and everyone is either for sale or in the circuit of the production and consumption of commodities” (Nguyen 133). Although Nguyen further argues that “[i]n *Dog eaters*, the problematic of commodification and sexuality finds its center in the world of film and its various locations of expression,” the author does not mention the dancehall. In “‘Splendid Dancing’: Filipino ‘Exceptionalism’ in Taxi Dancehalls,” Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns contests

that “[d]ancehall dancing is viewed as an unregulated, unmediated, and uninhibited movement...Sociality in the dancehall...is also about the negotiation of power” (27). As a central location “of expression” and one that houses the commodification of queer male bodies, I understand CocoRico to be the center of the novel’s narrative in relation to “the problematic of commodification and sexuality”.

As a prostitute involved in sex tourism with foreign males, I do not read Joey as ‘gay,’ but as ‘queer’. This is an important note to make as we attempt to understand Joey’s character better and the means by which his character operates within the queer tourist landscape. I argue that he is queer because he does not exclusively speak of having sexual interactions and intimacies with other males. Rather, Joey informs us of how “Uncle” arranged sexual encounters for him with women when he was younger (Hagedorn 44). At CocoRico, Hagedorn, nevertheless, exhibits the conflicted queer sexual interplays and prevalent power dynamic between prostitute (sex worker) and foreigner (sex tourist). Viet Thanh Nguyen writes that “*Dog eaters* is therefore concerned not only with modes of desire and sexuality but also with the actual existence, visibility, and acknowledgement of the [Joey’s] queer sexualized body through which these desires play” (126). We first learn that his sexual escapades with Western patrons of CocoRico are not simply for sexual pleasure. There are ulterior motives. In his monologue, Joey attests, “My steady clients, my one-night stands. Some more thoughtful than others, surprising me with an extra cash bonus, or a chain bracelet with my name engraved in gold. Sometimes I’ll steal from them, just to make a point...It keep that element of danger alive in their luxurious rooms” (Hagedorn 37). This passage informs us that by Joey referring to these men as his “clients” suggests, by the adoption of business-like language, that some exchange of commodities and/or services occurs. Also, the gifts or “cash” that he speaks of confirms that he



is a prostitute and recognizes sex work as a means for gaining commodities and/or capital. “He faces a problematic, queer embodiment wherein his queerness seems to emerge only through the attractive pull of global capital” (Sohn 319). Therein, his queer sexualized body is a form of neocolonial commodification.

CocoRico, in itself, functions as a *spatial commodity*. “In this moment, sexuality like everything else is a commodity, and commodities in their spectacular state are both the objects of desire for the inhabitants [and foreigners] of Manila and the signs of their oppression” (Nguyen 127). Dereka Rushbrook furthers Nguyen’s argument by arguing that “commodification of the city [Manila] has made urban cultural landscapes central to strategies of capital accumulation” (187). While the space of CocoRico operates as a spatial commodity, the most prevalent, and obvious, form of commodification throughout the novel is located in sex tourism. The manner by which Hagedorn writes of foreigners participating in sex tourism, specifically with Joey, demonstrates a new kind of imperialism of the queer Filipino male body.

Martin Opperman attests that “poverty is often mentioned as the primary reason for women in developing countries being involved in prostitution” (7). But this reading of prostitution culture in the developing world may be too gendered given Joey’s childhood and later involvement in prostitution. For Joey, the poverty for which he suffers, nonetheless, is his primary motivation for continuing sex work. In fact, it is his involvement in prostitution that leads Joey to develop financially gainful relationships with Western sex tourists, such as Rainer, the German director, and Neil, the American military man. In accordance to his relationship with Rainer, Joey gleefully remarks about the pleasures he receives from prostitution. Joey comments,

Without hesitating, I dive into turquoise water of the long pool. The impact of my body hitting the lukewarm water is a soft explosion, the only noise for miles

around. Happily, I float on my back, serene under the canopy of stars in the black sky. A coconut tree bends in a graceful arc over the pool. I could die right now, I feel so good. The German swims languidly beside me. (Hagedorn 146)

At this moment in the novel, Joey is comments on the sophisticated Manila residence that Rainer has taken him to. The manner by which he describes this space is much different than how he speaks of the CocoRico or anywhere else in the urban Manila landscape. We can also read Joey's experience at this elite residence with Rainer as a unique moment where we witness his physical and temporaneous social mobility. Rainer has the financial means to transport Joey and himself around Manila to various locations. As a result of his prostitution with sex tourists, Joey finds the means to gain money and commodities, mobilize in spaces he would not otherwise be able to enter, and have experiences that typically are outside of the working class lifestyle.

In terms of both Rio and Joey's struggle with the post/colonial/neocolonial commodification, their bodies and identities are further troubled by their relationships to their mothers. Their narrations subsist on the colonial fragments fixed within their familial dynamic, specifically with their mothers. The dynamic, or lack thereof, in relation to their mothers suggest them as 'abject'. (My use of 'abject' is borrowed from Julia Kristeva's theory of 'abject' as it concerns the mother.) Returning to Rio's narrative and ways in which she is a spectator and exoticizes foreign images, such as with actresses in Hollywood films, she also is a spectator to her mother. "Rio...sees her 'Rita Hayworth mother' constantly struggling to maintain appearances...Dolores Logan Gonzaga [Rio's mother] is a beautiful woman" (Mendible 293). Rio speaks of her mother's "smooth skin the color of yellow-white ivory" (Hagedorn 82) and the extent of Dolores's beauty rituals which consist of creams, moisturizers, "daily naps with masks of mashed avocado, mashed sinkamas, and a red clay from France smeared on her face" (82).

Her physical appearance is described as being like a Hollywood film actress. Her hair is even stylized in a particular fashion that provides it some mystique. Rio states that “she is always beautiful” (84). By the way that Rio describes her mother and admires her, it is clear then that Rio’s first experience within a voyeurscape is in interacting with her mother in their domestic space. Admiring the lightness of her skin and judging her as “always beautiful,” Rio recognizes herself as abject in relation to a kind of female beauty that her mother has but she does not. As abject, she, therefore, exoticizes her mother’s beauty, and, as a result, searches for female gendered beauty that she can identify with. For that reason, she extensively comments about all forms of female beauty, especially those forms which she is not, because her idea of beauty is located in foreignness.

Joey, however, is (prematurely) abject because of the lack of interaction and relationship that he had with his mother, Zenaida. As a result of her inability to care for him properly, Joey explains that Zenaida sold him to Uncle, an impoverished pimp. His only memories of Zenaida derive from what Uncle has told him. What he learns from Uncle is that “[s]he was a legendary whore” (Hagedorn 42). Although he recognizes both his mother and him as whores (205), his abjectness is more in relation to personal agency and self-preservation. Therefore, he sees agency in utilizing his queer sexualized body to access transnational capital. For him, after all, “men are easy” (44). Unlike his mother, Joey finds ‘power’ from sex work. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler writes that “we understand power as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are” (2). Sex work convinces Joey that he has control and is capable of preserving his selfhood. He remarks, “I’m nobody’s slave” (45). Moreover, it reminds

him that he is not his mother because she, according to Joey, never found or lost the power which he most likely understands led to her demise. Sex tourism in a particular manner satisfies Joey because not only does he gain capital and other material goods, he also avoids from being “disgraced and abandoned” (42) as he describes his mother was.

### *Conclusion*

In *Dogeaters* Hagedorn does not glorify her portrait of the postcolonial, pluralistic of the Philippines; rather, she aims to materialize the problems and complexities of identity for the Philippine nation and its inhabitants. “Thematically, *Dogeaters* is deeply concerned with this world of the commodity and its obfuscation to consumers, and through the use of literally confining spaces the novel demonstrates the confining nature of consciousnesses obsessed by commodities” (137). In the essay I have attempted to uncover the ways in which (post)colonial and neocolonial forces commodify, objectify, and/or exoticize the Philippine nation and, more importantly, its inhabitants. By closely reading both Rio and Joey’s narratives in relation to commodification of bodies and identities, I have suggested that they are subjected to U.S. imperialist efforts through the efforts of commodifying female gendered beauty in cinema and the queer sexualized body in the dancehall. In *Dogeaters* the gaze, as a discursive act, underlines the way in which it inherently addresses each narrator’s – Rio (‘the gazer’) and Joey (‘the gazed’) – racial, class, gender, and sexual anxieties and selfhood.

At the end of the novel, we learn that Rio is living in the U.S. and Joey has escaped into rebel encampment in the mountains. Both acts of escape suggest their desire to locate healthier forms of personal agency and confront their fears. For Rio, this consists of locating beauty outside of the postcolonial voyeurscape but in the U.S. cultural framework. For Joey, this means leaving the queer tourist landscape and allowing himself, with the help of others, to find value in

ideology disassociated from his queer sexualized body. They are actively disidentifying with their past marginalized identities. “These identities-in-difference,” writes José Esteban Muñoz in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, “emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere. Their emergence is predicated on their ability to disidentify with the mass public and instead, through this disidentification, contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere” (7). By Rio moving to the colonizer’s land and Joey relocating to the mountains to train in guerilla warfare, they are disidentifying with the identities that the (neo)colonizers have created for them. Hagedorn does not conclude that life is better for them, but there is hope that they have been freed from the fragmented postcolonial urban Manila landscape. Perhaps, they both can now lament *the kundiman*.

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